

Sunday, September 18, 2022

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

As I began to read over and study our texts today, I was struck particularly by our second lesson and the gospel text.

We've heard these texts before, in fact we hear them every three years. And I suspect some of us believe we hear them too often. I say that because they are likely not our favorite texts. What they have to say to us seems to run counter to where we find ourselves on any given day.

Specifically, based on our second lesson, how many of us pray for our leaders on a regular basis? How many of us pray for our leaders at all? Certainly, we do just that occasionally in our corporate prayers of intercession, but beyond that, maybe not so much.

And that seems especially true as we look at the political landscape that is before us today. How many who are registered Democrats pray for Republican leaders, and vice versa. In fact, how many of us pray for leaders of our own party?

Sometimes it seems it is easier and even more appropriate to not involve our prayers with politics and politicians.

And yet, it is also easy to understand and determine that our elected officials on all levels need our prayers, perhaps more than ever. Without being partisan, I believe we can all agree that all persons in leadership across the board need our prayers and the prayers of all people.

As this new school year has just begun, I would invite students to pray for their teachers by name. I would invite workers to pray for their supervisors. I would invite teachers to pray for their principals, and children for their parents.

And as we are just about to begin another cycle of mid-year elections, I would invite everyone to prayerfully consider who we vote for and pray for that person to be the leader we need right now. Whether or not we agree with all of their decisions, our leaders and public servants need our prayers in order to lead with justice and wisdom.

And we can certainly extend our prayers to include the leaders of the nations of the world and others who are entrusted with decisions that affect the masses. We can always pray for leaders who put the needs of the people first. We can pray that leaders will seek peace and justice instead of war.

If you do not regularly pray for people in leadership positions, I suggest you give the notion a great deal of thought and begin making such petitions part of your daily prayer life.

Our gospel text today is also challenging, specifically we are challenged to look at wealth, in fact at all we possess, in a new light.

Our gospel text reminds us that we cannot serve God and wealth. The mandate and challenge of followers of Christ by God's good and gracious favor – is to be in service to God. In service to God, we participate in a kingdom and an economy that looks like no other. In fact, nothing comes close.

God's economy bears little resemblance to the benefaction system of empire. In that system very few own essentially everything and everyone, and the increasing numbers of poor and needy are preyed upon, oppressed, and abused. The poor are continually indebted to those with means, and those with means owe each other, needing to reciprocate for every meal, every gift, and every service. It is an accounting that is transactional, and the ones on top and their cronies always win: everyone else owes them.

But, you see, in the kingdom of God this economy of benefaction is turned upside down, In God's good economy God has looked with favor on the lowliness of Mary and the shepherds. God has special favor for the poor and the oppressed and those who cry out for help – the poor who are in the ash heap of the world, the woman who has nothing. God has willed good particularly for them. God most high lifts up the lowly and seats the poor and needy among princes. And God seats the woman who had nothing in a joyous household – with a family and an economy of her own. God will indeed save.

You and I get a taste of the kingdom of God in the very contemporary story of the rich man and his failed manager. In the end, the rich man commends the dishonest manager for cutting the debts of those who owe him, And Jesus says that the children of light – those who are the people of God's way – could learn a thing or two from the children of this age. Be like the man who slashes the debts of his master's debtors. Make friends by means of dishonest wealth. Slash all the debts. Give to those who cannot give anything in return.

Give the money away so that the friends you make among the poor and oppressed might welcome you into the hospitality that lasts into the hope that is eternal.

As we look at the state of the world's economy today and perhaps especially as we view our nation's economy and our own household's economy we arrive at a place where we are seeing more and more very rich people who then wield more and more power and have a greater say in all facets of our society.

We also see what has been called the "middle class of America" shrinking dramatically. There are more and more folks who are moving down the economic ladder with little or no hope of improving their lot.

Our calling as followers of Christ is not to be underhanded about how we earn, spend, and distribute the money, the wealth that we have.

What is commendable, however, is the notion of cutting the debts of those who owe, who are indebted to us. While that may not always be possible, when it is, it is viewed in a very positive light.

And we do this not so we will be seen in a good light by the higher-ups. We do that because it is the way Jesus would have us live.

I've always looked at this parable of Jesus and have scratched my head a bit trying more and more to understand what its intent is for us today.

In some ways it just doesn't seem to make sense, to be logical, to have a great deal of relevance to our daily lives.

That being said, I believe we can better get a handle on the text by remembering that in a real sense Christ sits down with us and sees our sinful selves and without asking any questions of us, without varying if we are rich or poor, takes the account that lists the details of our sinfulness.

And then, he simply makes the sign of the cross on that account signifying that our debt is reduced to zero as he was nailed to the cross erasing forever our debt of sin.

With that in mind – we can more fully appreciate that our God wills that all be saved.

Instead of wanting and wishing that God's economic strategies match ours, we can more fully appreciate that ours should match God's.

Thanks be to God. Amen